

Wildercliff
Morton Road
Rhinebeck Vicinity
Dutchess County
New York

HABS No. NY-5628

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NY,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WILDERCLIFF

HABS No. NY-5628

Location: Morton Road, Rhinebeck, Dutchess County,
New York 12572

Present Owner and
Occupant: S. Grayson and Allison Hall

Present Use: Dwelling

Statement of
Significance: A large house with Federal style details situated on a bluff overlooking the Hudson River, Wildercliff was constructed in 1799. Wildercliff was the home of the Reverend Freeborn Garrettson (1752-1827), an early circuit riding Methodist minister, and his wife, Catherine, a daughter of Judge Robert and Margaret Beekman Livingston of the estate, Clermont. Wildercliff is one of twenty-one contiguous estates along the east bank of the Hudson River between Staatsbury and Tivoli, New York.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Catherine Garrettson reported in her Autobiography that construction began in May 1799. In October of the same year, the Garrettsons moved to Wildercliff from a farmhouse in the village of Rhinebeck.
2. Architect: The house probably was designed and constructed by the Rev. Garrettson as indicated by Mrs. Garrettson's Autobiography: "After living five peaceful years in our little cottage we determined on changing the place of our abode. It was necessary to build and my blessed friend Rev. Garrettson undertook the business, and our good and gracious God laid all his doubts and scruples aside by a most powerful manifestation of his love when raising the frame of the building."
3. Original and subsequent owners: Wildercliff was part of the Kipsbergen patent. The following references to the title of Wildercliff are located in the Dutchess County, New York, Deed Books:

1799 Deed September 23, 1799, recorded
Book 19 page 280
John B. von Wagenen and his wife, Margaret
to
Freeborn Garrettson

- 1880 Deed February 8, 1880, recorded
Book 199 page 448
Andrew Hunt and Francis T. Garrettson, executors
of the estate of Mary Rutherford Garrettson
to
Thomas H. Suckley
- 1923 Deed November 17, 1923, recorded
Book 400 page 18
Elizabeth M. Suckley, widow and recipient of the
estate of Robert B. Suckley who inherited the estate
of the father, Thomas H. Suckley
to
Margaret L., Katherine B., Robert B., Arthur R. Suckley
and Elizabeth Suckley Hambley, all brothers and sisters.
A trusteeship was established which named Margaret L.
Suckley, Robert B. Suckley, and William G. Murphy
trustees for the six land parcels. Parcel IV was
"lately the Homestead of Mary Rutherford Garrettson
known as Wildercliffe by survey by Hazard Champlin on
October 6, 1866."
- 1955 Deed May 9, 1955, recorded
Book 888 page 228
Katherine B. Suckley and Elizabeth Suckley Hambley
to
Margaret L., Robert B., and Arthur R. Suckley
- 1958 Deed July 12, 1958, recorded
Book 973 page 518
Margaret L., Robert B., and Arthur R. Suckley
to
Frederick W. Dupee and Barbara H. Dupee
- 1971 Deed July 13, 1971, recorded
Book 1312 page 168
Frederick W. Dupee and Barbara H. Dupee
to
Richard Doyle Rockwell and Charlotte Sanderson Rockwell
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: No documents survive relating to Wildercliff's construction. Ezra Tipple's biography of Freeborn Garrettson reported that "having the house to build, Garrettson did not travel, but remained at home to look after its construction.

Soon after Wildercliff's erection, Bishop Francis Asbury visited in August 1800, and wrote in his Journal: "We came to Freeborn Garrettson's new design, upon the Rhinebeck flats; he hath a beautiful prospect, and a good, simple elegant, useful house for God, his people and his family. We regaled ourselves and horses upon the pleasant banks of the Hudson where the passing and repassing of boats and small craft, perhaps fifty in a day, is a pleasant sight."

5. Alterations and additions: The first alterations to Wildercliff occurred c. 1830. The sash windows on the first floor of the south elevation were changed to French windows with double casements to provide access to the porch.

Abel Stevens' 1851 description revealed that a library room, also an addition, doubled as a Sunday School room. "The house itself is not ostentatious, but commodious, with abundant apartments; a beautiful library room -- consecrated as both a Sunday School and class room connecting with a conservatory, and looking out upon the river."

The present gambrel roof and four gambrel roofed dormers were added in conjunction with a new third story. A sketch made in 1861 showed the former simple gable roof.

After the removal of the glass enclosed conservatory, a bay window was installed on the west wall of the library. The south porch facing the Hudson was extended to the west facade.

In 1903, H. Alan Montgomery, an architect of New York City and brother of the tenant, Henry E. Montgomery, designed the east service wing to replace the cellar kitchen. A laundry, kitchen, and butler's pantry were added as well as bedrooms on the second and third floors. The Montgomery drawings are in the possession of the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Rockwell. These renovations were accomplished between 1903 and 1909.

B. Historical Context:

Freeborn Garrettson was born on August 19, 1752, near the mouth of the Susquehanna River at Perryman, Maryland. He was raised as a member of the Church of England. A visit by the itinerant preacher, Robert Strawbridge, encouraged Garrettson's conversion to Methodism in 1775. The Rev. Garrettson was admitted on trial to the Methodist conference at Baltimore and served circuits in Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia. During the Revolutionary War, Garrettson suffered imprisonment and physical violence because he refused to take oath to bear arms. In 1788 Garrettson was appointed presiding elder of the region stretching from Westchester, New York, north along the Hudson River to the Canadian border and westward along the Mohawk. It was a key assignment that began twelve circuits within two years and thus helped to open the trail west.

While on this preaching circuit, Rev. Garrettson met Catherine Livingston, sixth child of Judge Robert and Margaret Beekman Livingston. Born in 1752, Catherine was the only remaining unmarried daughter. Family legend says that one day Catherine Livingston stood at the window at Clermont and announced that she was going to marry the next man that came up the river. The next man was reported to be Freeborn Garrettson.

Following an intense conversion experience to what was considered a radical religious sect in 1787, Catherine became a devout Methodist. She withdrew from the active social life at Clermont. In a letter to Mrs. Janet Montgomery, Catherine described her alienation from her mother and family: "You know and I feel that since I had known the Lord which is four years last October I had continual sorrow from without and from within. I have been cast from my mother's affections and house, and had now no other home that such I derive from the bounty of a kind sister on whom I had been thrown."

(Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from records held at the Rose Memorial Library, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.)

Catherine Livingston was forced to leave Clermont to live with her sister, Margaret Livingston Tillotson. Her husband, Dr. Thomas Tillotson, was a native of Maryland who served as Surgeon General of Washington's army. It was through Tillotson's invitation that Freeborn Garrettson came to Rhinebeck and met Catherine. Their first meeting was later described by Mrs. Garrettson in her Autobiography: "Piety was little known at Rhinebeck where I chiefly resided. However it was not long before some Methodist clergymen with Mr. G came up by invitation to Mr. Tillotson at whose house I then resided. They left us and went on to form new circuits north and east. On this day I was told in prayer that this person would be my husband."

A long courtship ensued, initially with every opposition from Margaret Beekman Livingston. In 1791 Catherine was forbidden to receive Freeborn's visits. Finally in 1792, Catherine wrote to Freeborn to advise him that matters had improved: "I had a letter from Mrs. Tillotson a few days ago. She says if I saw any hopes of success my utmost exertions should be made in your favor. Mrs. Lewis also tells me tis her opinion and that of some more of the family that my wishes should be opposed no longer."

On June 30, 1793, Catherine Livingston was married to Rev. Garrettson at the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Rhinebeck in a ceremony performed by Rev. Peter Moriarty. Their first home "was a very humble one, well suited to their narrow income. Their experience during the first six years of married life was more in unison with that of their brethren than has generally been supposed." Nathan Bangs, Garrettson's first biographer, also stated: "From the time of Mr. Garrettson's marriage in 1793 until 1809, I find no regular account of his travels and labors." No letters from this period are preserved in the Garrettson Collection at Drew University. Therefore, it appears that Rev. Garrettson remained for the most part in Rhinebeck, while serving as presiding elder of the New York, New Jersey, New York City, and Philadelphia circuits.

In 1799 Garrettson began to build a house on the Hudson. Catherine's siblings received riverfront portions of the former Beekman patent, inherited by Margaret Beekman Livingston and passed on to her children.

Rev. Garrettson, however, purchased Wildercliff's land from John Von Wagenen. The land had been part of the Kipsbergen patent. The new house was called "Traveller's Rest" by Bishop Asbury because there was always a room reserved for itinerant preachers. Later the house became Wildercliff, named for a stone with Indian markings found in a nearby cove.

Reverend Garrettson died in 1827 at the house of his friend George Suckley in New York City. Catherine Garrettson remained at Wildercliff until her death in 1849.

Their daughter, Mary Rutherford Garrettson (1794-1879), maintained Wildercliff as a center of Methodist activity until her death. Abel Stevens in The Women of Methodism described an interior filled with antique furniture, a fine library, and numerous portraits of the Livingston family.

PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

1. Plans: The following renovation drawings by Alan Montgomery are owned by Mr. and Mrs. Richard Rockwell:

Additions to House of Henry E. Montgomery, including Cellar, First Floor, Second Floor, North Elevation, East Elevation, South Elevation, West Elevation, and four sheets describing details. Drawings of the stable alterations are also owned by the Rockwells.

2. Deed Books: The Deed books are located in the Dutchess County Clerk's office, Poughkeepsie, New York.

3. Old Views:

- a) Photographs c. 1875 owned by Mr. and Mrs. Rockwell show the south elevation with observatory.
- b) A sketch of Wildercliff in 1861 illustrates the house before the gambrel roof was added. The glass observatory is also shown to the west of the library room.
- c) An undated photograph of the north facade owned by Miss Margaret Suckley shows a porch with slender columns. The porch is now enclosed.

4. Manuscripts:

- a) Ph.D thesis of Robert Drew Simpson, "Freeborn Garrettson: American Methodist Pioneer," Madison, New Jersey, 1954.

- b) The journals of Freeborn Garrettson, journals and autobiography of Catherine L. Garrettson, and numerous family letters are held in the Freeborn Garrettson Collection of the Rose Memorial Library, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey. The Garrettson Collection also includes the correspondence of Miss Mary Rutherford Garrettson.

B. Secondary Sources:

1. Books:

Asbury, Francis. The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church from August 7, 1771 to December 7, 1815. New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1821.

Bangs, Nathan. The Life of Freeborn Garrettson. New York: Carlton & Porter, 1832.

Delafield, John Ross. "The Stories of Linwood, Wildercliff, and Ellerslie." Yearbook of the Dutchess County Historical Society, XVI (1932), pp. 42-46.

Dutchess County Planning Board. Landmarks of Dutchess County, 1683-1867. New York City: New York State Council on the Arts, 1969.

Eberlein, Harold Donaldson and Cortlandt Van Dyke Hubbard. Historic House of the Hudson. New York: Bonanza Books, 1942.

Hibbard, Billy. Memoirs of the Life and Travels of Billy Hibbard. New York: Printed for and published by the author. Piercy & Reed, Printers, 1843.

McClintock, John D. D. Sketches of Eminent Methodist Ministers. New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1854.

Smith, James H. History of Dutchess County. Syracuse: D. Mason & Co., 1882.

Stevens, Abel. Sketches from the Study of a Superannuated Itinerant. Boston: Charles H. Pierce & Co., 1851.

Stevens, Abel. The Women of Methodism: Its Three Foundresses, Susanna Wesley, The Countess of Huntingdon, and Barbara Heck. New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1869.

Tipple, Ezra. Freeborn Garrettson. New York: Eaton & Means, 1910.

Van Kleeck, Balthus B. Jr. "The Federal Period in Dutchess County 1789-1825 Background and Architecture." Yearbook of the Dutchess County Historical Society LI (1966) pp. 430-49.

Prepared by Susan Stein, 1975

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored jointly by the National Park Service and the Dutchess County Landmarks Association, with a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts; measured and drawn during the summer of 1973 under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), by Richard Crowley (Architect, Rhinebeck), Project Supervisor, Architectural Technicians Patrick Anders (University of Arkansas), Paul Newman (Ohio State University), Steve Parsons (Texas Tech University), Victoria Piwonka (University of Houston), and Project Historian Susan Stein (The University of Chicago), at Rhinebeck, New York. The historical and descriptive data was edited in 1981 for HABS by Susan Stein, Architectural Historian. Final preparation of the documentation was carried out in the HABS Washington Office by Paul Dolinsky, HABS Architect, and Lucy Pope Wheeler, HABS Writer/Editor.

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